

**Town of Amherst Ways and Means Committee Report
for the Amherst Town Deliberative Session February, 2005**

The Amherst Town Ways and Means Committee would like to express its thanks for the support the Selectmen, the town administrator, selectmen's assistant, and all of the town department heads have given the Ways and Means Committee during this budget cycle.

The Ways and Means Committee continues to support the open environment that the Selectmen have taken towards the development of the town operating budget and other warrant articles. This approach involves the Town Ways and Means Committee in all aspects of budget development. The committee has been an integral part of the process from the time the budget target was established in September 2004 through the period when budget and warrants were voted on by the Selectmen in January 2005. The committee had ample access to the Selectmen, Town Administrator and Town Department Heads throughout this process.

The Ways and Means committee applauds the efforts of the town administrator and selectmen in finding innovative approaches to improving the efficiency of the town government. The Board of Selectmen has met the challenge of providing consistent or improved service to the citizens of Amherst, a fair and equitable wage to its employees, while holding tax increases to levels that are consistent with the cost of living increases.

After careful consideration of the Town operating budget and the other warrant articles, the Town Ways and Means Committee is prepared to make the following recommendations:

Article 2: (Open Space Land Bond) To see if the Town will raise and appropriate, the sum of five million five hundred thousand dollars (\$5,500,000) for the purchase of open space lands or other property interests and to authorize the issuance of not more than \$5,500,000 of bonds or notes in accordance with the provisions of the Municipal Finance Act (RSA 33) and to authorize the Selectmen to issue and negotiate such bonds or notes and to determine the rate of interest thereon; furthermore, to authorize the Selectmen to acquire said property exercising their authority under RSA 41:14-a, including the requirement for at least two (2) public hearings prior to binding the town to any such purchase, and, further, that the amount raised and appropriated herein may be used to defray the costs attributable to due diligence inspections, title search charges, closing costs and other similar charges associated with any such acquisition. These funds may only be expended to meet conservation and passive recreation needs, except that an amount no greater than 15 percent (or \$825,000) of said \$5,500,000 may be expended to acquire open space lands to meet active recreation needs, if suitable parcels become available, The authorization to borrow provided hereunder shall not lapse until five (5) years from the date of the passage of this article. 3/5 Ballot Vote Required.

The Ways and Means Committee **supports** this article with a vote of 7 in favor and none opposed.

The Ways and Means Committee feels that in addition to the direct benefits of conservation and recreation land, purchasing this land insures that it will not be developed, thus avoiding adverse cost impacts of additional pressure on the Town's infrastructure, including the schools.

The Amherst Open Space committee and the Amherst Conservation Commission have done a lot of preparation in regard to this warrant article. The warrant article provides for the involvement of the citizens of Amherst through two public hearings which are to be conducted prior to the purchase of any property.

Article 3: (Baboosic Lake Bond) To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of three hundred sixty five thousand three hundred twenty two dollars (\$365,322) to construct Phase I of the Baboosic Lake Community Septic System, one hundred fifty nine thousand nine hundred ninety three (159,993) will be provided by a New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services Watershed Restoration Grant, \$73,064 or 20% is to be provided from the State of New Hampshire State Aid Grant and to authorize the issuance of bonds or notes of not more than \$132,265 in accordance with the provisions of the Municipal Finance Act (RSA 33) and to authorize the Selectmen to issue and negotiate such bonds or notes and to determine the rate of interest thereon and a term not to exceed ten (10) years. No dollars will be raised through taxation and any cost associated with this project will be assessed in accordance with RSA 149:1-7. 3/5 Ballot Vote Required.

The Ways and Means committee **supports** this article with a vote of 7 in favor and none opposed.

The Ways and Means committee strongly supports this warrant. No taxpayer funding is required. This community septic system will benefit the entire town by improving the water quality of Baboosic Lake. All of the funding will come from the persons whose land benefits from the septic system

Article 4: (Tanker Replacement Bond) To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of Three Hundred Thousand and 00/100 (\$300,000) Dollars, to purchase a Fire Department Tanker Truck and to authorize the issuance of not more than \$300,000 of bonds or notes in accordance with the provisions of the Municipal Finance Act (RSA 33) and to authorize the Selectmen to issue and negotiate such bonds or notes and to determine the rate of interest thereon; payable over a term of ten years. (3/5 ballot vote required)

The Ways and Means Committee **supports** this article with a vote of 7 in favor and none opposed.

The Ways and Means Committee recognizes that the current Fire Department Tanker has past its useful life and must be replaced to maintain the high quality of service

provided by our Fire Department. The Fire Department has looked for and recommended the most cost effective replacement Tanker Truck.

Article 5: (Fire Department Capital Reserve) In the event that the Town fails to approve Article 4, above, (Tanker Replacement Bond), to see if the Town will raise and appropriate the sum One Hundred Thousand and 00/100 (\$100,000), Dollars, to be placed into the existing Fire Apparatus Fund Capital Reserve Account.

The Ways and Means Committee supports this article with a vote of 5 in favor and none opposed (2 members absent).

Because of the anticipated bond for the Tanker Truck, no provision was included in this year's operating budget for adding to the existing Fire Apparatus Fund Capital Reserve Account. In general the Ways and Means Committee supports the existence and use of capital reserve funds as an effective means of funding large capital items, especially during periods of high interest rates. The Ways and Means Committee supports the addition to the Fire Truck Apparatus Fund Capital Reserve Account as a means for funding a future replacement of the Tanker in the event that Article 4 fails approval.

Article 6: (Operating Budget) To see if the Town will raise and appropriate as an operating budget, not including appropriations by special warrant articles and other appropriations voted separately, the amounts set forth on the budget posted with the warrant or as amended by vote of the first session, for the purposes set forth herein, totaling \$7,677,763. Should this article be defeated, the operating budget shall be \$7,420,915.28 which is the same as last year, with certain adjustments required by previous action of the Town or by law, the governing body may hold one special meeting, in accordance with RSA 40:13, X and XVI, to take up the issue of a revised operating budget only. This article does not include any other appropriation.

The Ways and Means Committee supports this article with a vote of 7 in favor and none opposed.

There has been a lot of discussion and cooperation between the town departments to look at how the town can more efficiently provide the same level of town services at a lower cost. This has allowed the Selectmen to keep the budget within their stated target for FY2005.

The Amherst Town Ways and Means Committee has been very involved in the budget process since the very beginning back in September 2004. We have met with the Selectmen, Town Administrator and all of the Department Heads several times and have gone over each line item in the budget multiple times. After several iterations, the Selectmen were able to achieve their stated target and the committee supports this budget.

Although the gross budget increase of 5.5% exceeded the target established in September, the Ways and Means Committee recognizes that portions of this budget generate operating revenues (fees and other income) and this income should be considered into the overall formulation. A conservative projection of Operating Revenue increases for 2006 reduces the effect of the net budget increase to the taxpayers to less than 3.6%, which is within the target established in September.

Article 7: (DPW Union) To see if the Town will vote to approve the cost items included in the collective bargaining agreement reached between the Selectmen and the Teamster's Union (*Department of Public Works Union*) and further to raise and appropriate the sum of \$50,775 for the current fiscal year, such sum representing the additional costs attributable to the increase in salaries and benefits over those of the appropriation at current staffing levels paid in the prior fiscal year.

The Ways and Means Committee **supports** this article with a vote of 7 in favor and none opposed.

The Selectmen and the Teamster's Union have worked to come up with an agreement that is both fair to the Town and to the unionized Department of Public Works employees. Approving this ratifies the work previously done and shows support for these employees.

Article 8: (Police Union) To see if the Town will vote to approve the cost items included in the collective bargaining agreement reached between the Selectmen and the American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees Union (*Police Union*) and further to raise and appropriate the sum of \$77,635 for the current fiscal year, such sum representing the additional costs attributable to the increase in salaries and benefits over those of the appropriation at current staffing levels paid in the prior fiscal year

The Ways and Means Committee **supports** this article with a vote of 7 in favor and none opposed.

The Selectmen and the American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees Union have worked to come up with an agreement that is both fair to the Town and to the unionized Police employees. Approving this ratifies the work previously done and shows support for these employees.

Article 9: (Town Hall First Floor Office Renovation) To see if the Town will raise and appropriate the sum of one hundred sixty thousand dollars (\$160,000) for the continuing reconstruction of the Amherst Town Hall to include interior structural and office improvements and fixtures. This will be a non-lapsing appropriation per RSA 32:7, VI and will not lapse until the project is completed or by June 30, 2007, whichever is sooner

The Ways and Means Committee **supports** this article with a vote of 7 in favor and none opposed.

The Ways and Means Committee supports this article which will bring to a close this phase of a multi-year renovation and restoration of the town hall project by completing the public areas of the facility. Although a final phase to complete landscaping and exterior maintenance items remains and is planned in the future, this warrant article finalizes the internal renovations and will bring the town hall to a fully functional facility.

Article 10: (Capital Reserve Fire/Brush Truck Purchase) To see if the Town will appropriate the sum of Forty Three thousand five hundred dollars (\$43,500) for the purpose of purchasing a pickup/brush fire fighting vehicle for the Fire Department and authorize the withdrawal from the Capital Reserves Fire Apparatus Fund established for this purpose.

The Ways and Means Committee **supports** this article with a vote of 7 in favor and none opposed.

The purchase of this vehicle is fully funded from the Fire Apparatus Capital Reserve fund. By purchasing this vehicle the Fire Department will be able to consolidate the functions currently being performed by two separate aging vehicles, resulting in a net reduction in overall operating expenses.

Article 11: (Capital Reserve DPW Truck Purchase) To see if the Town will appropriate the sum of seventy three thousand dollars (\$73,000 for the purpose of purchasing a one-ton four season truck replacing a three-quarter ton pickup truck for the Department of Public Works and authorize the withdrawal from the Capital Reserve Highway Vehicle Fund established for this purpose.

The Ways and Means Committee **supports** this article with a vote of 7 in favor and none opposed.

This vehicle is fully funded by the Capital Reserve fund and replaces a limited use aged vehicle with a truck that can serve multiple uses supporting highway department needs on a year round basis. This truck is also equipped with liquid de-icing equipment which will allow greater use of this form of de-icing in the winter, reducing the town's dependence on salt during the winter.

Article 12: (Repair and Replace DPW tank apron and pumps) To see if the Town will raise and appropriate the sum of sixty one thousand two hundred dollars (\$61,200) to be used to replace the concrete apron protecting the underground fuel storage tanks located at the Highway Department and to replace the thirty-year old gasoline and diesel dispensing pumps at the same location.

The Ways and Means Committee **supports** this article with a vote of 7 in favor and none opposed.

The replacement pumps will allow improved monitoring and tracking of fuel usage for the town. Additionally, the new pumps include improved filtration which will reduce vehicle maintenance costs arising from contaminated fuel. The fuel aprons themselves are in serious need of repair due to cracking which constitutes a potential environmental risk.

Article 13: (Landfill Improvements) To see if the Town will raise and appropriate the sum of Two Hundred Forty Five Thousand Dollars (\$245,000), (Gross Budget), to be used to construct an exit on Route 101, and construct a new drop-off and collection area. One Hundred Forty Five Thousand and 00/100 (\$145,000) Dollars to be raised by general taxation and the additional amount of One Hundred Thousand and 00/100 (\$100,000) Dollars to be contributed by the Souhegan Regional Landfill District.

The Ways and Means Committee **supports** this article with a vote of 7 in favor and none opposed.

This Warrant Article constitutes the first phase of what is envisioned to be a multi-year program to upgrade Amherst Transfer Station. These improvements will improve the ability to deal with the increased traffic at the transfer station, and facilitate greater recycling by improving access and reducing congestion. In addition to reducing the environmental burden, increasing recycling has the added benefit of bringing in additional revenue through sale of recyclable materials.

Article 14: (Baboosic Lake Dock Replacement) To see if the Town will raise and appropriate the sum of twenty one thousand dollars (\$21,000) to be used to replace wooden docks with aluminum ones at Baboosic Lake Park.

The Ways and Means Committee **supports** this article with a vote of 5 in favor and two opposed.

The Ways and Means Committee recognizes the recreational value of Baboosic Lake to the town of Amherst and neighboring communities. The current docks are in disrepair and replacing the docks will improve the ability to offer additional activities at the lake. The members opposing this Warrant Article agree with the objective of improving the facility, but would like to see this project included as part of a comprehensive recreational plan from the Recreation Committee. The net tax burden resulting from incremental projects such as this might be reduced through fees and other sources.

Article 15: (Home Health & Hospice Care Request) To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate ten thousand one hundred six dollars (\$10,106) to support Home Health & Hospice Care to allow them to continue to provide free care to residents of Amherst.

The Ways and Means Committee **supports** this article with a vote of 7 in favor and none opposed.

The Ways and Means Committee recognizes the importance of the services provided by Home Health and Hospice Care and unanimously supports this request.

Respectfully Submitted by:

John Maynard, Chairman
Shannon Chandley
Linda Kaiser
Ted Krantz
John Lobsitz
Becky Herlihy
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